

June 24, 2019
Ways and Means Committee
Medicare For All Hearing Submission

To Whom it may concern I'm writing to encourage Congress to adopt a universal healthcare system for all residents of the United States. Our nation is the only developed nation not offering its residents access to needed medical care at no cost at the point of service. I invite the members of the Ways and Means Committee to explore the research done by other nations in their quests for fairer, better and less expensive medical care. This is an issue I am passionate about. My passion arises from two personal life experiences. I served in the US Army from 1965 to 1968. Most of my military career was spent in Germany doing photographic work. I married a German citizen shortly before leaving active service. We decided to stay in Germany to explore the possibility of remaining there. I went to work as a photo lab assistant for a large communications company then known as Telefunken. The position offered was introductory and paid very little. Our first child was delivered in a German hospital and the expenses were covered by their insurance system. Covered completely. Germans pay premiums on a sliding scale. The more you earn, the more you pay. Visits to the doctor for my little family caused no headaches or loss of sleep worrying about paying for them or prescribed medications. Over the years I've maintained contact with friends and family members some of whom have been seriously impacted by cancer, Parkinson's disease and various heart ailments. All are cared for with minimal impact on their family finances. A nephew is a pediatric orthopedic surgeon. None of his patients need be concerned about payment. That's the way Germans like it and they are willing to contribute to the wellbeing of their fellow citizens through a fair system of taxation that costs only about half of what we pay per person. This is the story in most of the developed world. We accept publicly financed fire and police departments, public schools, public water and water treatment systems and view them as foundational in our society. Why not healthcare? My wife and I decided to return to the US where I used my G.I Bill benefits to help finance my education to become a teacher. Over the years she worked in several healthcare settings. Her career and her life came to an end in 1995 when she developed a brain tumor. Her treatment was excellent, but she succumbed in the Fall of 1996. My out of pocket expenses were minimal. My teacher's insurance covered most of the expenses and some hospital charges were written off as an employee benefit by her employer. She was working at a local hospital at the time of her diagnosis. After the death of my wife I began to think about my good fortune. To say I was thankful would be an understatement but I was no more deserving of special treatment than the next person. I just benefited from circumstances. My experience in Germany told me that no one should have to fear financial ruin because of medical expenses. It is just a question of societal commitment and compassion. Various studies have shown that a publicly financed universal system covering all residents, while expensive, would cost less per person than we now pay and would provide all US residents with equal access to high quality care. Conservative and liberal factions in nations who have moved to universal, publicly financed systems in whatever form both support the idea. They differ in details, but not in the general approach. Taiwan's system, for example, was proposed by conservative members of its government. I'm just saying, it can be done. So let's do it. My deepest thanks for your kind consideration of my remarks.

Gaen McClendon